



Final Report: July 1, 2003, to February 29, 2004

**BULGARIA: VOTER EDUCATION AND GET-OUT-THE-VOTE
IN ADVANCE OF LOCAL ELECTIONS**

USAID Cooperative Agreement No. 183-A-00-03-0012-00

I. SUMMARY

Although Bulgaria has made progress in democratization and accession into such transnational organizations as NATO and the European Union, polls in early 2003 showed that Bulgarian voters were disillusioned with their political parties and elected officials. As national parties failed to address citizens' concerns, it became clear that the October 26, 2003, local elections would present an opportunity for parties to address the growing disconnect with citizens and run campaigns based on local issues rather than the traditional national campaigns dictated by national headquarters. Civil society organizations (CSOs), in their capacity as liaisons between the public and elected officials, also had an opportunity to call attention to local issues and organize citizens to get involved in political processes.

From July 1, 2003, through February 29, 2004, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) conducted a Get-Out-the-Vote (GOTV) and voter education program with the following objectives:

- CSOs conduct targeted voter education and GOTV campaigns based on citizens' interests in advance of the local elections; and
- CSOs organize citizens to participate in the political process in advance of the local elections.

Through this program, NDI issued small grants totaling approximately \$40,000 to 25 local NGOs in 17 municipalities throughout Bulgaria to conduct voter education and GOTV activities. In addition to providing funding, the Institute also trained these organizations and held regular consultations with each to ensure that activities were substantive and successful. A second focus of the program was a nationwide *Ti Izbirash* campaign, which brought together nine national CSO networks to create a logo and national advertising and information campaigns. After the local elections, NDI received a no-cost extension to complete a GOTV manual that provided tools and lessons learned to *Ti Izbirash* partners and other organizations seeking to

conduct similar campaigns in the future. NDI observed several results of this program, including the following:

- Through the small grants program and the national campaign, CSOs working with NDI recruited and trained more than 600 volunteers to participate in local and national GOTV and voter education programs.
- Fifty percent of the CSOs reported that their local campaigns led to their next project. For example, they will now work for child protection rights, introduction of a local ombudsman, and the creation of a municipal fund to assist disabled citizens. In half of these cases, the CSO was approached by a donor agency impressed with its *Ti Izbirash* activities.
- In Gotse Delchev, where a CSO conducted activities targeting Muslim women, women's participation reached 42.68 percent compared to 39.18 percent in 1999. As the population of Gotse Delchev is predominantly Muslim and has traditionally experienced low voter turnout among women, this can be viewed as a result of the program.
- Roma participation in Lom's largest Roma neighborhood, where the CSO Independent Living focused its activities, was ten percent higher than the average for the rest of the city.

II. BACKGROUND

In 2001, Bulgarian voters elected a movement led by Tsar Simeon Saxe-Coburg into power based on a sweeping reform agenda proposed by the former king. Since those elections, the National Movement of Simeon II (NMS) has overseen Bulgaria's acceptance into NATO and continued progress in European Union accession negotiations, but the party's public support has declined. The campaign goals that resonated with voters in 2001, such as combating corruption and building a stronger economy, went unfulfilled, and polls showed high voter dissatisfaction with Bulgaria's governing institutions. Without public support at the municipal and national levels, political leaders would find it increasingly difficult to complete European Union decentralization requirements in time for accession in 2007. In addition, Bulgaria's leading opposition parties, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), showed a similar inability to respond to voters' concerns, leaving Bulgarian citizens to believe they had few political alternatives.

Compounding this sense of voter apathy were the methods used by parties to conduct election campaigns in past local election cycles. Candidates campaigned locally using national platforms that did not address such every day concerns of voters as the deteriorating health and education systems, local unemployment, or the economy. Marginalized groups, including Roma, Turks, youth, and women, historically were neglected during these campaigns, leaving the groups with little motivation to visit the polls on election day. CSOs, while present in most communities, had not proven their abilities to effectively aggregate public opinion. The common perception among government officials and constituents was that CSOs only conducted activities based on the interests of and funding from international donors and not the public.

The October 26 local elections were an opportunity for CSOs to prove their abilities to facilitate dialogue between local officials and citizens and to motivate the public to participate in

elections. Recognizing the needs and opportunities presented by the local elections, NDI assisted CSOs during the pre-election period in strengthening their connections with citizens to generate public interest in the local elections and in positioning themselves to work collaboratively with local government after the elections. Following the elections, NDI continued to work with the CSOs as they conducted activities with newly elected officials. The specific goals of the program were the following:

- CSOs conduct targeted voter education and GOTV campaigns based on citizens' interests in advance of the local elections; and
- CSOs organize citizens to participate in the political process in advance of the local elections.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

National GOTV Campaign

Throughout the program, NDI worked with a group of nine CSOs (or CSO networks) to create a GOTV program that would be visible throughout Bulgaria and would serve as an umbrella under which all local projects would operate. Participants of the campaign included the following organizations:

- The National Network for Equal Opportunities, a network of civic organizations affiliated with the Women's Alliance for Development;
- The National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB), an association of local elected officials;
- Different Together, a national network of Roma CSOs;
- Youth in Action, a national youth network of approximately 30 youth groups funded by the C.S. Mott foundation;
- Center for Independent Living, a national network that works with disabled citizens;
- Citizen Activity Network, composed of labor unions throughout Bulgaria;
- Radio Alma Mater, a radio station managed by students at Sofia University;
- Vsekiden.com, a web-based campaign focused on disseminating information and commentary on the elections; and
- Bulgarian Media Coalition (BMC), an organization dedicated to developing Bulgaria's independent media outlets.

NDI worked with each of these networks or organizations in earlier programs, including the two previous *Ti Izbirash* programs prior to the 2001 parliamentary and presidential elections. Representatives of each organization met on a monthly basis to determine the campaign theme and logo (see right) and to develop materials for distribution during the national campaign. Through this national campaign, organizations that did not participate in the Institute's small grants program were provided materials to conduct their own small-scale campaigns.



With its partners, NDI created an advertising campaign that was aired on Bulgarian Television (BTV) and radio stations for four weeks prior to the elections. On September 24, NDI and its CSO partners held a national press conference that marked the official start of the 2003 *Ti Izbirash* campaign. Approximately 10 media outlets attended, and the event was covered in several of Bulgaria's largest newspapers, including *24 Hours*, *Sega*, and *Novinar*.

Between September 28 and October 24, the *Ti Izbirash* television advertisement aired 93 times on national television, and 180 times on national radio stations. In the ads, Bulgarians explained their reasons for voting and reminded the public to visit the polls on October 26. The *Ti Izbirash* program also received earned media coverage on local news stations, and was featured in a sketch on one of Bulgaria's most watched television shows, *The Slavi Show*.

Training for National GOTV partners

Prior to the start of *Ti Izbirash*, NDI conducted several training sessions for national partners on issues as broad as citizen participation and as detailed as conducting voter education activities in Roma communities. NDI designed these sessions in response to specific requests from its national partners.

On July 5 and 6, NDI facilitated a workshop on citizen participation at the first annual meeting of the National Network for Equal Opportunities. Nearly 30 CSO representatives attended the session, which focused on sharing good practices and lessons learned through prior projects; conducting needs assessments and outlining the challenges that CSOs face in Bulgaria; and developing common goals and action plans for involving more citizens in the network's activities throughout the country. NDI also presented its voter education and GOTV program to the entire network, encouraging CSOs to apply for the small grants program and announcing the first round of training for CSOs.

NDI conducted a GOTV workshop at the NAMRB's final pre-election general assembly on July 12. This event provided an excellent opportunity for NDI to reach out to elected officials and inform them of the Institute's GOTV efforts, since all of Bulgaria's 263 mayors attended this meeting, as well as several CSOs, media outlets, government officials, and international donors. More than 80 mayors attended NDI's workshop on GOTV activities. Recognizing that most participants were seeking re-election in October, NDI stressed that nonpartisan GOTV efforts added to the success of political campaigns by bringing more voters to polls, and the Institute provided the Association with voter education tactics it could employ at the national level.

On September 11, NDI conducted a workshop for the Different Together and Youth in Action networks. The session was attended by 28 CSO representatives (11 Roma and 17 youth) from throughout Bulgaria, and topics included basic voter education, GOTV methods and political organization skills. NDI also provided an overview of the previous *Ti Izbirash* campaigns and discussed the roles of these organizations in the current program. Because they were members of the national campaign, NDI could not provide funding through its small grants program to the two networks, but the Institute negotiated with the networks' parent organization, Center for Grassroots Alternatives (SEGA), which agreed to fund \$100,000 in supplementary small grants to Different Together and Youth in Action. This agreement spread NDI's program

to an additional 18 communities (3 Roma and 15 youth) for local activities to complement the national campaign.

Work with CSOs

An important aspect of NDI's 2003 *Ti Izbirash* activities was the small grants program that allowed local CSOs to conduct GOTV efforts. Coordinated with the national campaign, the CSO programs ensured that the *Ti Izbirash* program reached voters in most major cities and many smaller locales. In addition to receiving funds up to \$1,500, participating CSOs attended three two-day workshops in which they acquired skills in proposal drafting, conducting GOTV and voter education activities, and working with local officials in the post-election period.

NDI invited approximately 100 CSOs to apply for small grants, with a particular focus on CSOs that targeted such groups as Roma, Turks, women, youth, and disabled citizens. The Institute also contacted its former *Ti Izbirash* partners (including the Women's Alliance for Development, SEGA, Podkrepa labor union, and the Center for Intercultural Relations and Minority Studies), members of USAID's DemNet program, the Center for Independent Living, and the Foundation for Liberal Integration, a network that works with Turkish CSOs, to inform them about the small grants program.

NDI received proposals from 37 organizations that targeted a range of municipalities and minority groups. NDI formed a five-person panel to review the proposals using a publicly announced system that would assign points based on the following criteria:

- Realistic and achievable objectives;
- Campaign message and evidence of testing;
- Realistic campaign schedules and delegated responsibilities;
- Targeting of underrepresented populations; and
- Cost-effectiveness.

NDI submitted its proposed list of projects, notified the groups that they would receive funding. Prior to receiving the first tranche of funds in mid-September, each group was required to attend an NDI training and subsequently submit a revised workplan with more specific and targeted activities, improved campaign messages, better targeting of populations and relevant indicators that would assist in program evaluation. Between the training and the distribution of funds, two CSOs withdrew from the program, leaving NDI with 25 small grant recipients.



The 25 CSOs participating in NDI's third *Ti Izbirash* program engaged in such activities as door-to-door canvassing, direct GOTV, voter education, transportation of people with disabilities to polls, and phone-banking. Full descriptions of their activities can be found in Appendix One. In addition, examples of debates, direct voter contacts, election-day activities, and other CSO events are described below. The map above shows the municipalities in which the CSOs conducted activities.

CSO Training

NDI conducted its first round of GOTV training for CSOs in southern Bulgaria on August 7 and 8 in Plovdiv and on August 11 and 12 for CSOs in northern Bulgaria in Veliko Turnovo. Jennifer Butz, NDI/Albania country director, trained representatives of approximately 40 CSOs on such political organization tactics as collecting voter information; conducting phone banks and other GOTV activities; developing, testing, and delivering an effective message; and creating a campaign schedule. Attendees practiced their new skills through a mock campaign strategy session, where they developed a GOTV plan targeting a specific population sector. The workshop ended with a session on effective proposal writing, as many of the CSOs in attendance had little experience submitting formal grant applications.

NDI provided grants and training to the following CSOs in 2003:

- National Alliance for Volunteer Action (Plovdiv) LIK Community Center (Pleven)
- Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections (Pleven)
- Interethnic Partnership Association (Varna)
- PROXEN Women's Union (Kazanlak)
- "Future for Silistra" Youth Organization (Silistra) "Vassil Levski"
- Human Rights Center (Karlovo)
- Podkrepa Labor Confederation (Sofia, Vratsa, Blagoevgrad, Lom, Kazanlak, and Dupnitsa)
- Roma Future Association (Rakovski)
- Association for Development and Spiritual Renaissance (Sofia)
- IKAR Association (Haskovo)
- Nevo Drom Association, (Kjustendil)
- Association of Parents and Children with Disabilities (Varna)
- Women's Alliance Nadezhda (Razgrad)
- Women's Alliance for Development (Sofia)
- Gender Project for Bulgaria (Pernik)
- Balkan Assist (Sofia)
- Independent Living – Roma (Lom)
- UNA of Bulgaria – Youth Section (Sofia)

NDI's second training was open only to those CSOs selected to receive funds from the Institute. On September 4 and 5, 6 and 7, NDI held the second round of training for northern and southern CSOs, respectively. NDI Civic Participation Director Aaron Azelton was the featured trainer during these workshops, which focused on refining activity workplans and building GOTV skills. NDI also provided CSOs with a summary of local election laws and privacy laws that would directly affect their activities.

Through the initial training sessions in August, NDI learned that the participating CSOs possessed a wide range of skills and experience in regards to GOTV campaigns and voter education. Several of the CSOs, including Pleven-based *Lik* community center and the Bulgarian Association for Free Elections (BAFE), had participated in *Ti Izbirash I* and *II*, and therefore had experience in GOTV planning. Other CSOs had virtually no experience and needed more basic skills training. As a result, NDI designed its second training to respond to the needs of both groups by separating them and holding different sessions.

Those in the beginner session received training on the basics of volunteer recruitment, message development, and event planning. The advanced session featured more in-depth

discussion of the same topics, with an emphasis on maintaining a volunteer pool after a campaign's conclusion. NDI met with CSOs individually to discuss their proposed activities, and following the training session, CSOs submitted their revised workplans with more detailed activities and goals.

Small Grants Administration

After disbursing the small grants to CSOs, NDI continued to work with groups on an individual basis to ensure that activities were conducted according to their workplans. Once the nationwide *Ti Izbirash* program commenced, NDI used the weekly reports required as part of the grant agreement to create four newsletters. These newsletters were distributed on a weekly basis to *Ti Izbirash* national partners, CSOs, and international organizations, and served to publicize the activities of CSOs across the country to interested parties. The third newsletter in the series is attached to this report as Appendix Two.

In October, NDI selected a representative sample of its small grant recipients and conducted financial audits to ensure that activities and expenses were consistent with proposed activities. To achieve the representative sample, NDI selected seven organizations based on location and not on perceived performance. In addition to the audits, NDI representatives traveled to each municipality to observe activities in the weeks before the election to ensure that all programs were proceeding as expected.

CSO Activities

Debates

In Pernik, *Ti Izbirash* partners organized the community's first public forum on Roma issues on October 17. At least one candidate running in the local election from each political party attended the event, as well as 200 Roma community members. The event attracted significant media and public interest because of the turnout among candidates and the controversial nature of Roma issues in Pernik.

Candidates displayed varying degrees of preparation for the event and understanding of the issues of the Roma community. The candidate who presented the most coherent positions was Antoaneta Georgieva, the UDF candidate. In addition to her strong performance during the forum, she met with Roma women after the debate to work on a strategy to involve more Roma women in local government administration. Georgieva was ultimately elected mayor in a run-off election. Analysts reported that this would not have been possible without the support of approximately 5,000 Roma voters.

Direct Voter Contact

Phone banking and door-to-door canvassing proved to be two of the most popular methods of voter contact during the *Ti Izbirash* program, especially in urban areas. Local partner CSOs conducted phone banks in Pleven, Vratsa, Lom and Gotse Delchev. *Ti Izbirash* volunteers contacted 20,000 voters through door-to-door canvassing in 14 communities: Pleven,

Asparuhovo, Varna, Haskovo, Dupnitsa, Blagoevgrad, Lom, Karlovo, Sofia, Razgrad, Vratsa, Gotse Delchev, Sevlievo and Rakovski. While phone banking was considered preferable to door-to-door canvassing, volunteers reported that going door-to-door was most effective in areas with dense and cohesive populations, such as student dormitories and Roma neighborhoods.

Ti Izbirash partners also set up information centers and held first-time voter classes to establish direct contact with voters. In Plovdiv, approximately 5,000 high school students attended voter education classes and extracurricular activities on the importance of voting. Information centers were established in Sofia, Plovdiv, Karlovo and Gotse Delchev.

High-Profile Special Events

With its small grant funding, an informal group of young people in Sevlievo organized a two-day event targeting youth from the ages of 18 to 35. The event, held on October 18 and 19, served as an opportunity for youth to educate their peers about the importance of voting. Popular DJs and bands performed and the group held a contest for the best youth GOTV message.

This event followed the first and only youth-organized candidate debate held in Sevlievo during an election cycle. During the event, candidates discussed youth priorities previously identified through a questionnaire distributed to more than 1,000 local youth. Because the top issue identified in the questionnaires was the lack of entertainment options in the area, debate organizers chose to have the event at a local disco. The youth *Ti Izbirash* program in Sevlievo was so well-organized and highly regarded that each of the six candidates for mayor attended the debate. Following the formal debate, candidates danced and chatted with attendees.

In Sevlievo, the informal youth group continued its activities after the elections. All citizens aged 18 to 35 were invited to participate in a mail-in vote for a youth municipal council, which would advise the local government on issues of concern to local young people. The election was held in mid-November, and approximately nine percent of the town's youth participated in the elections.

Election Day Activities

Several *Ti Izbirash* partners planned activities immediately prior to or on election day to encourage citizens to vote. In Varna, Sofia, Asparuhovo, Karlovo and Lom, organizations provided transportation and assistance to disabled voters. *Ti Izbirash* volunteers distributed stickers, post cards, and "I Voted" balloons in Lom, Sevlievo, Gotse Delchev and Plovdiv. In many cities, local CSOs conducted their own exit polls to determine the success of their pre-election activities.

Post-Election Activities

CSO Post-Election Training: "Citizen Participation in Local Government"

On November 10 and 11, NDI held its third and final *Ti Izbirash* training session for 25 representatives of 22 partner CSOs. Although the small grants program had officially ended,

participants expressed interest in following up on their election activities with newly elected councilors and mayors.

During this final workshop, each participant presented results of his/her organization's activities and shared lessons learned during the course of the project. Participants exchanged the materials they developed during the campaign with one another and traded advice. Of particular note was a discussion on the new opportunities for citizen participation in local Bulgarian governments that arose as a result of the CSO pre-election activities. NDI's primary trainer for this session was Bogdana Shopova from the Foundation for Local Government Reform. Shopova worked with participants on methods and techniques for creating and solidifying connections between CSOs and local governments through choosing an issue, devising tactics, and creating an action plan.

"For the first time we have completed a project that took us to a next campaign. Now we cannot say it's over and drop the issue after all we have done around it, and will have to continue to work on the Roma integration strategy."

Roma Future Rakovski

NDI also facilitated a session for CSOs to develop realistic proposals for changes to the election law, including changes that would more clearly define the rights of organizations to operate on election day. *Ti Izbirash* partners collected all of the ideas to develop a consolidated document. Mira Hadjimitova, executive director of the Gender Project for Bulgaria and a member of the public council of the parliamentary committee on civil society issues, submitted the consolidated document to the committee, where it was reviewed during the second committee reading of the election law in January.

GOTV Manual

During the first quarter of 2004, NDI drafted a GOTV manual to provide CSO partners with tools to conduct future GOTV campaigns and non-election related advocacy campaigns. The manual was completed in February and includes chapters on strategic campaign planning, targeting, creating a GOTV message and recruiting volunteers. NDI also dedicated a chapter to several specific GOTV tactics in the areas of contacting voters directly, using the media in a GOTV campaign, and coalition building. To illustrate the concepts described in the manual, NDI used examples from the three *Ti Izbirash* campaigns throughout the manual. (The manual's table of contents is attached to this report as Appendix Three. The complete manual can be found at www.ndi-bg.org/docs/GOTV_Manual_en.pdf.)

"This is the most comprehensive handbook on Get-Out-The-Vote Campaigns – and in fact the only one I have seen. It is different, not a translation of foreign models, but Bulgarian lessons and experiences. I am proud our organization participated in the Ti Izbirash campaign and contributed to this manual."

Pavlina Filipova, WAD

NDI Bulgaria Website

In late February, NDI launched a website, www.ndi-bg.org. The website provides training materials and resources from all of NDI's programs, including the three *Ti Izbirash* projects. Once fully operational, the site will allow *Ti Izbirash* partners and other interested

CSOs to communicate their progress and concerns with each other and with the Institute. The GOTV manual will be available on the site, as will program updates, and newsletters. NDI will maintain the website with funding from the National Endowment for Democracy.

“Private-Public Partnership for Local Governance” Roundtable

Following the elections, NDI and its national *Ti Izbirash* partners - SEGA, WAD, NAMRB, Center for Independent Living, and the Local Government Initiative - participated in a roundtable to discuss ways to improve relations among CSOs, the public, and the newly elected local governments. The event was held on November 26 in Sofia and was funded by the Open Society Institute. Joining the CSO representatives were the Sofia Ombudsman, UDF leader Nadezhda Mihailova, BSP Deputy Party Director Roumen Ovcharov, UDF Deputy Chair Milan Milanov, Gergiovden leader Lyuben Dilov, and 40 of the 61 Sofia municipal councilors.

CSO representatives encouraged political leaders in attendance to amend the Rules of Procedure to increase transparency, accountability and citizen participation. Specifically, the CSOs proposed the following:

- Publishing agendas seven days prior to council sessions;
- Making information available to the public within three days following each session;
- Creating a public registry of all entities owned by the municipality;
- Making municipal administration hiring processes competitive; and
- Instituting weekly visiting hours to allow the public to speak directly with councilors.

Discussions were lively and the municipal councilors agreed to each proposed amendment to the Rules of Procedure with the exception of a revision that would create a competitive bidding process for municipal contracts and property sales, and contracts for privatization of municipally owned businesses.

Foundation for Local Government Reform

The Foundation for Local Government Reform invited *Ti Izbirash* partners to participate in its civil society project by sharing the website and print materials to increase citizen participation. Seven *Ti Izbirash* CSOs have supplied information to the website, which is located at www.flgr.bg. NDI will continue to encourage its CSO partners to participate in this innovative new project.

IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Objective: CSOs conduct targeted voter education and GOTV campaigns based on citizens' interests in advance of the local elections.

Indicator: Select CSOs develop strategic campaign plans for voter education and GOTV activities.

- NDI received 37 applications for participation in the small grants program, and granted funds for 25 of the proposed projects. Each project included targeted, realistic, and cost efficient activities designed to increase voter awareness at the municipal level. The following campaigns were particularly well-targeted and structured:
 - In Sevlievo, a group of youth activists created a voter education program entitled “You are Young! Choose Your Future!” The group employed door-to-door canvassing, information tables at area high schools, candidate forums, and local television advertisements to disseminate its message and voter education information to its target audience, young voters.
 - In Sofia, Balkan Assist created a campaign that targeted first-time voters through a series of citizen participation classes conducted in local high schools, printed materials, and a candidate forum on issues affecting area youth.
 - In Razgrad, the Women’s Alliance Nadezhda used two waves of door-to-door canvassing and a series of voter education seminars to encourage its target population, local service sector employees, to participate in the elections.
- Members of two national *Ti Izbirash* partners, Different Together and Youth in Action, developed a total of 18 local activity proposals that were funded by parent organization SEGA.
- NDI’s national CSO partners, including the Equal Opportunity Network, Center for Independent Living, and the Citizen Activity Network, developed strategic plans that were used by its local affiliates to implement *Ti Izbirash* activities.

Indicator: Select CSOs conduct research on citizens’ attitudes, through such means as surveys, focus groups, and questionnaires and develop targeted messages as a result.

- CSOs in seven municipalities conducted a preliminary wave of door-to-door canvassing to educate voters on the importance of local elections and to determine voter attitudes. The CSOs used this information to further refine their message and activity plans as the elections approached. In Varna, for example, the Interethnic Partnership Association conducted a door-to-door survey of 1,500 community members. Prior to the elections, the Association hosted a candidate debate where the discussion centered on the issues raised in the survey.

Objective: CSOs organize citizens to participate in the political process in advance of the local elections.

- Through the small grants program and the national campaign, CSOs working with NDI recruited and trained more than 600 volunteers to participate in local and national GOTV and voter education programs.

- In Gotse Delchev, the Association for Development and Spiritual Renaissance campaigned to involve Muslim women in the elections and local political processes. More than 100 women attended a candidate forum, where they questioned the candidates regarding the living and working conditions of women in the area.
- Fifty percent of the CSOs reported that their local campaigns led to their next project. For example, they will now work for child protection rights, introduction of a local ombudsman, and the creation of a municipal fund to assist disabled citizens. In half of these cases, the CSO was approached by a donor agency impressed with its *Ti Izbirash* activities.
- Pre-election activities involving local candidates led to newly established local government contacts for CSOs in the post-election period. In several cities, the campaign led to additional activities, including signed guarantees for cooperation, creation of a youth parliament, and a regional strategy for the integration of Roma, to name a few.

Indicator: Select CSOs build a volunteer and activist base that can be drawn on after the election.

- In Sevlievo, a group of youth activists created a contact database of volunteers who had participated in pre-election activities and used this database to organize and hold elections for a youth municipal council.
- In Pleven, the Lik Community Center recruited and trained 21 volunteers to distribute voter education materials to first-time voters. Project coordinators collected volunteer information for use in future community projects.
- In Plovdiv, the National Alliance for Volunteer Action recruited and trained more than 70 volunteers to conduct door-to-door canvassing and to man information tables in schools and other public areas.

Indicator: Voter turnout in the 2003 local elections increases in targeted towns as compared to the 1999 local elections.

- In Gotse Delchev, where a women's CSO conducted activities targeting at Muslim women, women's participation reached 42.68 percent compared to 39.18 percent in 1999. As the population of Gotse Delchev is predominantly Muslim and has traditionally experienced low voter turnout among women, this can be viewed as a result of the program.
- In Sevlievo, first-time voter participation reached 44 percent, which is a 5 percent increase from 1999. An election day survey conducted by the Sevlievo youth group showed that 89 percent of the people who voted knew the campaign, and 45 percent said the campaign was among the factors that motivated them to vote.

- Roma participation in Lom's largest Roma neighborhood, where the CSO Independent Living focused its activities, was ten percent higher than the average for the rest of the city.
- In Gotse Delchev, NDI's partner CSO conducted a phone bank in precinct 24 for the first time. Turnout in 1999 was 42.5 percent; in 2003, it was 48 percent.

Unanticipated Results

- In January 2004, the Center for Human Rights "Vasil Levski" in Karlovo received an award from the city for the best CSO project for 2003 for its *Ti Izbirash* campaign. The award was based on a survey of citizens conducted by the local newspaper that overwhelmingly voted the Center's work to involve disabled citizens in the elections the most effective in the municipality.
- Based on discussions with youth voters during the *Ti Izbirash* campaign, the United Nations Youth Club contacted the newly elected Sofia city council to address the main youth issues identified through questionnaires, phone banks and internet chat rooms: improving conditions in student dormitories, enhancing public transportation in Sofia, and reducing the number of stray dogs in the city.

V. EVALUATION

Although the national voter turnout in 2003 was ten percent less than in 1999, NDI considers the third *Ti Izbirash* program a resounding success for the participating CSOs. The weak national voter turnout can be attributed to several factors, including voter disillusion with local officials who have traditionally been ineffective and unresponsive to voter needs. In addition, a general dissatisfaction with the country's national leaders contributed to voter apathy, as the ruling NMS has not yet fulfilled many of its campaign promises from 2001. While voter dissatisfaction was the main factor in the low turnout, NDI noted that Bulgarian citizens living abroad, who were ineligible to vote from outside the country, appeared on the voter lists and were counted among the eligible voters who merely did not go to the polls.

NDI was pleased with the CSOs' implementation of the small grants programs, as they delivered a range of timely and appropriate activities that followed clear strategic plans. In the communities where NDI and its partner organizations were active, individual gains in minority and youth turnout point to the success of *Ti Izbirash* programs. For example, activities conducted by the Association for Development and Spiritual Renaissance that focused on Muslim women, the Gender Project for Bulgaria's campaign targeting Pernik's Roma community, and the informal youth group that took its message to young people in Sevlievo brought a higher level of targeted voters to the polls than in previous local elections.

The Institute estimates that CSO projects in 18 communities reached more than 62,000 voters, engaged nearly 700 volunteers, and distributed well over 50,000 pieces of voter education literature. With assistance from NDI, participating organizations targeted specific populations, and in most cases, found that their messages were disseminated effectively. Many organizations

used their small grants to conduct field surveys, which allowed them to better understand the needs of their communities. In several communities, organizations were eager to cooperate with each other and to provide their expertise without dominating the group. In some cases, they extended the projects beyond their original parameters; for example, SEGA's willingness to fund additional CSOs nearly doubled the number of local organizations conducting *Ti Izbirash* activities.

Although NDI's third *Ti Izbirash* program officially concluded with the local elections on October 26, the work continued well into the first quarter of 2004. While compiling lessons and examples for the GOTV manual, NDI learned of several efforts by small grants recipients to continue their work with local councils on a long-term basis. Even without the prospect of additional funding, several of NDI's small grants recipients sought the Institute's advice on continuing their work started in the pre-election period. CSOs that participated in NDI's small grants selection process are now equipped with the skills to write clear, specific, and realistic proposals to receive funding from other sources, including the European Union and other foreign donors. NDI is optimistic that these organizations will continue to use the skills gained through this program to conduct future issue-based advocacy and GOTV programs. NDI also anticipates that CSOs that formed coalitions for this program will continue to use their new networking skills to work together, even if informally, on future projects.

A challenge remains in convincing local government officials that cooperating with CSOs in a non-election environment is worthwhile. Although CSOs were able to draw candidates to their events and elicit promises from politicians for future reforms, they have not been as successful in convincing the same officials to enact those promises. In Sofia, for example, council members who attended the roundtable on private-public local governance have not followed through with the proposals submitted by CSOs. Although the organizations provided substantive, realistic solutions to legitimate problems, local officials are reticent to enact changes that may detract from their influence. To this end, NDI will continue its work with CSOs in 2004, assisting a select number of organizations as they create local advocacy campaigns and work with local governments to create substantive reform. Several of NDI's *Ti Izbirash* partners are expected to participate in the Institute's 2004 program, which will be funded by the National Endowment for Democracy.

APPENDIX 1: *Ti IZBIRASH* CSO CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

1. National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA), Plovdiv

“*Be different, be yourself, go vote!*” was the message of the campaign carried out by the National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA) in Plovdiv. The project focused on increasing voter turnout among young people and first-time voters. A total of 75 young volunteers were recruited to participate in the campaign. During the initial stage of the project, two sessions were organized with the purpose of training volunteers on how to conduct two of the main activities of the local campaign: door-to-door canvassing and tabling (voter information centers).

The NAVA team working on the local *Ti Izbirash* Campaign canvassed in 19 out of 25 high schools in Plovdiv - language schools, professional schools, and general high schools; in percentage terms, it reached 85% of the first-time high school voters in the city. Twenty meetings with both students and teachers from the above-mentioned schools were organized at which students were acquainted with their rights as voters as well as with the specificity of the voting procedure. Teams of trained NAVA volunteers conducted interviews with 5,000 first-time voters in Plovdiv and distributed more than 10,000 copies of information brochures. In addition, 1,500 posters and 1,200 stickers were posted all over the city several days in advance of the 2003 local elections with the aim of challenging young people and all other citizens to vote.

Four information centers were opened in key locations in Plovdiv. One special mobile info center was designed for the students from the six schools of higher education in the city. Useful information concerning the election process was provided to more than 8,000 young people belonging to the target group. All students and citizens interested in the campaign had the chance to participate in the internet message boards on NAVA’s website. In addition to school meetings, E-mail and SMS reminders were used as untraditional methods for increasing voter participation.

NAVA volunteers as well as the team working on the local campaign took part in a media forum on EUROCOM cable TV channel. What is more, the local cable TV showed a specially designed video spot motivating young people to vote. An article on the local *Ti Izbirash* Campaign in Plovdiv was published in NAVA’s monthly newsletter.

The NAVA campaign led to a turnout increase of its target audience by 1.5%: from 26% in 1999 to 27.5% in 2003 measured by Alpha Research exit polls. The NGO took action to measure the efficiency of its campaign by questionnaires in a sample of high schools in the immediate post-election period. The questionnaires revealed that their efforts had increased high school kids’ awareness significantly (around 30%), whereas the result in terms of changing behavioral patterns and actual voting was more modest (1.5%).

2. LIK Community Center, Pleven

LIK was among the *Ti Izbirash* veterans having participated in the two previous GOTV programs. In the meantime the NGO had grown and developed, and it had made impressive achievements.

Its efforts under this year’s *Ti Izbirash* were “geographically” directed – to voters registered in three selected polling sections in Pleven, which had a history of traditionally low turnout in the last three elections.

Aimed at providing a bridge to electoral participation, the local campaign conducted by LIK focused on phone banking and door-to-door canvassing as a means of generating voter enthusiasm. LIK’s volunteers talked to first-time voters on the phone giving special attention to the undecided students as well as to those who needed more information on the voting procedure. The two waves of door knocking reached 1,090 families registered in the respective polling sections. In addition, topical high school assemblies were called in the five high schools of the targeted area in Pleven. The meetings were attended by a total of 640 students who had acquired the right to vote.

A total of 21 volunteers were recruited and trained to work on the project, and 1,500 copies of print materials were distributed throughout the campaign, including leaflets, stickers and door hangers.

The campaign was broadly covered by local electronic and print media: Pleven Local Radio Station, EUROCOM TV Channel, and the newspapers “Posrednik” and “Posoki.”

As a result of the NGO’s efforts, voter turnout was 2.15% higher in the precinct where it worked: in precinct # 82 where it worked the turnout was 37% compared to 34.85% in the neighboring precinct # 84.

3. Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections (BAFE), Pleven

BAFE Pleven is also a *Ti Izbirash* veteran. This year's local campaign targeted first-time voters in 10 selected high schools in the city. A special schedule was designed for visiting the schools and giving interactive presentations on civic education to students.

A specially designed *Ti Izbirash* educational video film developed by BAFE Pleven campaign volunteers was shown to about 1,500 students. In addition, the film was shown on the two local TV channels and broadcast by the local radio station. The video spot aimed at acquainting the audience with the nature of the democratic processes and citizen participation, the election procedure in Bulgaria as well as with the types of electoral systems functioning in the country and all over the world. The students were acquainted with their rights as voters and with the choice they have. They also had the opportunity to touch real ballots for the first time. Questionnaires were given to students before and after they had watched the film to see what they learned.

Fifteen BAFE volunteers went door-to-door, distributing the educational leaflet of the local campaign and interviewing young people on whether they plan to vote in the upcoming local elections. Those who answered "NO" as well as the undecided voters were contacted by means of phone banking.

4. Interethnic Partnership Association, Varna

The organization based in Asparuhovo Residential District near Varna recruited and trained 58 volunteers between the ages of 18 and 50. The process of volunteer recruitment went quite smoothly because many people showed interest in the local *Ti Izbirash* campaign. In the beginning the volunteers felt unconfident, but as the campaign was unfolding they seemed to enjoy it more and more.

A survey on people's attitudes on the local elections was conducted as the volunteers of Interethnic Partnership Association were going door-to-door in an effort to increase voter turnout. A total of 1,500 respondents were interviewed. The interviewees were asked to point out some of the most pressing problems facing the municipality. Unemployment, poor road system, inefficient municipal administration, poor quality of education and pollution were among the most commonly mentioned issues.

An information center was opened in Asparuhovo Residential District where the print materials of the campaign were distributed. In addition, volunteers were distributing print materials in three stores in the neighborhood. A total of 3,600 print materials were distributed throughout the campaign.

A high visibility event was organized for the purpose of introducing the candidates for mayors to the general public. Only 3 out of 17 invited candidates attended the event. The candidates who responded to the invitation of the organizers presented their platforms and shared their views on the future development of Asparuhovo Residential District. In the course of the meeting volunteers were gathering "ballots" in special urns. On the ballots the citizens attending the debate had written some of the most pressing problems of the community.

Interethnic Partnership Association also provided assistance to people with disabilities registered in four polling stations in Asparuhovo Residential District in Varna. A total of 45 people with disabilities had submitted transportation requests on election day. Transportation assistance was provided to 49 people. In addition, assistance was provided to 28 citizens who had problems with their ID documents.

On election day volunteers of *Ti Izbirash* Campaign were giving stickers with the words "I made my choice, what about you" to all citizens who have already exercised their right to vote.

5. PROXEN Women's Union, Kazanlak

With the purpose of conducting a more effective and powerful local campaign, the youth group at PROXEN Women's Union carried out its project in coalition with 12 youth organizations based in Kazanlak. The project was directed to first-time voters in the town.

The initial phase of the project was dedicated to coalition building. Following that, 27 volunteers were trained on how to carry out the main activities of the campaign: surveys, literature drop, tabling, organizing a rally and a concert, etc.

PROXEN's volunteers conducted two surveys in all 9 high schools in Kazanlak. The first wave of the survey was carried out at the end of September. It reached 293 first-time voters. Asked whether they were going to vote, 29 % of the respondents gave a negative answer, 62 % gave a positive answer and 9% said that they hadn't decided yet. The second wave of the survey started several days before election day and was completed several days after

election day. The second wave had the aim of showing how successful the local *Ti Izbirash* campaign was. Out of 197 students (first-time voters), 187 said that the information they received as a result of the *Ti Izbirash* Campaign was useful, only 10 thought that the info provided throughout the campaign was insufficient to persuade them to vote.

Nine info centers were opened near the schools where 1,500 copies of print materials were distributed. The centers were visited by 1,011 representatives of the target group.

On 14 October 2003 a roundtable was organized. Thirteen youth organizations, six candidates for mayors and local media were invited to participate. The main objective that brought participants together was to initiate an open dialogue among candidates for mayors, youth organizations and young people. Among the topics discussed were education, unemployment, ways of spending one's spare time and youth violence. Young people presented their demands and the candidates had the chance to express their position on the issues raised. Special attention was given to the problems of the Roma youth in the city. All candidates agreed that efforts need to be made in the direction of achieving Roma integration at all levels, as well as in the direction of offering Roma different opportunities for development. The event stirred the interest of both participants and media.

The roundtable was held as a follow-up to the spectacular rally of young people and youth organizations in which more than 110 people marched along the main street of the city and provoked the interest of the general public. The high visibility event aimed to mobilize youth and demonstrate its strength. The march, in which more than 110 young people participated, was led by the Women's Rocker Club "Tender Roses" and the Men's Rocker Club "Black Roses." The most attractive element of the rally were the rocker motorbikes covered by campaign stickers. The rally grew into a rock-the-vote concert. The event gathered approximately 250 young people who enjoyed the performance of local bands, sketches with actors from the actors' club associated with the Lyubomir Kabakchiev Theater, and folk songs presented by Kazanlak high school students with national recognition. The concert ended with a party at the discotheque for the youth.

6. "Future for Silistra" Youth Organization, Silistra

The project for increasing citizen participation among young people in Silistra was directed to first-time voters and more specifically to those who haven't graduated high school yet or to those who are first-year students at the two local schools of higher education. The team carrying out the project also worked actively with the candidates for mayors and municipal councilors in the municipalities of Silistra district. The project envisaged the establishment of a regional youth lobby responsible for increasing future politicians' interest in and commitment to the problems of the young people in the region.

The long-term objective of the project was to establish stable contacts with young people from Silistra district and to motivate them to participate actively in the political process at the local level, not only on election day but also throughout the whole term in office of the future local government.

Seven roundtables were organized in the seven municipalities of Silistra district: Silistra, Tutrakan, Glavinitsa, Sitovo, Alfatar, Dulovo and Kaynardja. The roundtables enjoyed the interest of both the candidates and the young people, and in all municipalities apart from Silistra they were the only election campaign event.

Thirty volunteers were recruited and trained under the project. A total of 1,000 direct contacts with representatives of the target group were established, and 2,200 copies of print materials were distributed in the targeted high schools, schools of higher education as well as in the cafes visited mainly by young people.

7. "Vassil Levski" Human Rights Center, Karlovo

The local campaign conducted by "Vassil Levski" Human Rights Center in Karlovo aimed at increasing voter turnout among people with disabilities living in the municipality. It turned out, however, that throughout the campaign the target group was broadened to incorporate young people and representatives of the Roma community as well. *Ti Izbirash* local campaign in Karlovo was supported by two local media partners and enjoyed broad media coverage.

The Human Rights Center recruited and trained 15 volunteers to work on the program. About 10,000 copies of various print materials were distributed - voter's manuals, leaflets, shopping bags with the logo of the campaign, etc. A special exhibition was organized at which the candidates for mayors had the opportunity to show their campaign materials. The exhibition hall was visited by at least 200 people a day.

The issue of *accessibility* was constantly raised throughout the campaign. A total of 112 people with disabilities were visited in their homes, 78 (or 70 percent) of whom went to the polls. One accessible polling station for people with disabilities was established. The election-day efforts of the Human Rights Center in Karlovo were focused on providing free access to the polls to people with disabilities. This is the main obstacle to overcome in order to raise the turnout of people with disabilities. The Center advertised a telephone line for transportation requests. They provided a minivan with appropriate equipment and a driver to take voters from their homes to the polls and back. Trained assistants accompanied voters with disabilities in the booths.

The Human Rights Center volunteers had prepared a list of 423 people with disabilities who had been contacted directly through other campaign activities and who might be expected with transportation and assistance requests.

The NGO held a candidate debate “Elections 2003 – a vote accessible to everyone” which was attended by five candidates for mayors in Karlovo. The problems of people with disabilities, young people and the Roma community were discussed at the debate. The forum was organized with the support of Dialogue Daily and Sky TV Channel.

Football teams of candidates for mayors and municipal councilors supported by most of the major political parties took part in a football competition organized in Karlovo under the motto “*Let’s revive Karlovo Football*” in an effort to generate enthusiasm. The football competition was held on the day of the Bulgarian Municipality – a coincidence with important implications for the overall *Ti Izbirash* campaign message and tactics. Famous Bulgarian actors who also participated in the competition contributed to the high visibility of the event.

8. PODKREPA Labor Confederation, Sofia

The campaign of PODKREPA Youth Union in Sofia targeted first-time voters in an effort to encourage citizen participation and increase voter turnout among young people. The organization recruited and trained about 30 volunteers.

As a first stage of their local campaign PODKREPA youth activists in Sofia organized a training seminar in the town of Pravets. About 30 representatives of the Youth Union, PODKREPA from various professional structures of the confederation on the territory of Sofia as well as first-time voters from several high schools in the capital participated in the training. The following topics were discussed at the seminar: Law on Local Government; the functions of the local government; Law on Local Elections; communication skills; volunteer recruitment; canvassing techniques, and interviewing.

The second stage of the project was focused on establishing suitable canvassing sites in Sofia. The main activities of the campaign were carried out in and around high schools. Canvassing was done by both coordinators and volunteers. Canvassing materials were distributed in METRO and BILLA hypermarkets as well as in public transportation vehicles, the resident districts of Liulin, Drizhba, Lagera, Pavlovo, Slatina, Goe Milev, and in some tax directorates as well.

9. Informal Group of Young People on the territory of Sevlievo Municipality

The campaign “*You are Young. Choose Your Future!*” for increasing voter turnout among young people had engaged 54 volunteers. The youth group applied different methods of voter contact: survey of attitudes and issues, an all-candidate forum with youth focus and audience, literature development and distribution, youth discos attended by the candidates as well. Throughout their efforts the group had the media support of the local Sevlievo press and won the sympathy of the older population.

The first campaign of this kind was conducted in Sevlievo. An information campaign was carried out acquainting about 5,000 people between the ages of 18 and 35 with their rights as voters, the specificity of the voting process and the voting procedures. Four information centers were opened in four high schools in Sevlievo. Nine individual meetings with the candidates for mayors in Sevlievo municipality were carried out. The meetings provided the young people with the chance to present to the candidates a list of demands, based on the surveys of attitudes and issues that were conducted.

A broad local media campaign was launched. One video spot and three audio spots were designed that were broadcast on two cable TV and one radio station on the territory of Sevlievo Municipality for a period of one month. All media events, such as the press conference, which announced the beginning of the *Ti Izbirash* campaign in Sevlievo, enjoyed the interest of both print and electronic local media.

On election day *Ti Izbirash* volunteers walked the street of the city to encourage their peers to exercise their right to vote and offer information and assistance if needed. The peak activity hours were 10 AM to 12 PM and 4 PM to 6 PM – regularly the time of highest turnout. As part of their efforts volunteers conducted a survey in front of the polls to determine what had motivated people to vote and if they were aware of the *Ti Izbirash* campaign. Most voters responded with pleasure, expressed their appreciation of the campaign on both local and national levels and congratulated the volunteers on their commitment and hard work for the development of their home town.

All members and volunteers of “Youth Sevlievo” evaluate their efforts as very positive and effective and believe they have achieved good results in encouraging the young people in Sevlievo to cast a ballot and thus participate in the decision-making process in their community.

10. PODKREPA Labor Union, Vratsa

PODKREPA Labor Union based in Vratsa conducted a local campaign targeting people in active age (18-60) living in the territory of the seven municipalities of Vratsa District (Vratsa, Mezdra, Roman, Krivodol, Kozlodui, Hairedin, Mizia) as well as the unemployed population from the same district. The campaign aimed at increasing voter turnout through voter education efforts.

More than 100 volunteers were recruited, 80 of whom were trained in the seminars PODKREPA Vratsa carried out.

Phone banking and door-to-door canvassing were the main methods employed throughout the campaign. PODKREPA Vratsa volunteers established 20,000 direct contacts in the territory of the whole district.

Candidate forums were organized in five of the municipalities of Vratsa District at which the candidates for mayors presented their views on how they plan to solve some of the most pressing problems the municipality was facing.

11. PODKREPA Labor Union, Blagoevgrad

The local *Ti Izbirash* campaign conducted by PPODKREPA Labor Union based in Blagoevgrad targeted PODKREPA members and their families in the region.

The organization recruited and trained 12 volunteers. The method used was meetings with union members. A total of 168 direct contacts were established. The meetings were carried out in a friendly atmosphere and the workers were encouraged to participate in a discussion. Very often those who expressed their willingness to vote and those who thought that participating in the local elections is pointless entered into a verbal battle. For example, in the beginning of one of the meetings out of 35 participants only 5 people expressed their desire to vote. At the end of the meeting after a heated discussion 30 of the workers were convinced that they should cast a ballot in the upcoming election. The national leaflet was distributed at the meetings.

Two waves of phone banking were carried out. The first wave took part in the beginning of October. It was aimed at surveying the attitudes of PODKREPA members around the coming local elections. The second wave was conducted several days in advance of election day. Volunteers working on the project talked on the phone to PODKREPA members to remind them that the local elections would be held on 26 October.

The high-visibility event of the local campaign in Blagoevgrad was the candidate debate. It was attended by 9 candidates for mayors in the municipality. The attendance was considered a huge success by the organizers having in mind that 13 candidates were invited to participate. The forum was focused on key issues raised during the discussions with the workers. It was moderated by a journalist from the local radio and was covered both by the local radio station and the local cable TV.

12. Roma Future Association, Rakovski

The local *Ti Izbirash* campaign conducted by Roma Future Association based in Rakovski targeted the Roma population living on the territory of four municipalities – Rakovski, Chalakovi, Striama and Belozem. The project aimed at encouraging Roma people in the region to take an active part in 2003 Local Elections. Through a series of town hall meetings for the first time in Bulgaria the Roma community in Rakovski designed a local strategy for Roma community development.

The following activities were carried out in the framework of the local *Ti Izbirash* campaign: recruiting and training 18 volunteers; meetings with candidates of Roma origin; “mouth-to-mouth” canvassing; a candidate debate entitled: “*The Equal Integration of Roma in the municipality of Rakovski.*” The objective of the debate was to present the local strategy to the attention of the candidates and negotiate potential collaboration. Due to its innovative character

of the collective document the debate enjoyed the interest of both national and local media, the Roma community and human rights organizations .

13. Association for Development and Spiritual Renaissance, Sofia

The local campaign of the Association for Development and Spiritual Renaissance targeted women of Muslim origin registered in three polling sections of the Dunav neighbourhood in Gotse Delchev.

As a result of the project overall voter participation compared to the national was 7% higher. Women's participation increased by 3.5% and reached 42.68% compared to 39.18% in 1999.

Methods employed throughout the campaign were door-to-door, phone banking, literature drop, debate, folk concert, voter pledges.

Phone banking was considered unsuccessful. In a small town like Gotse Delchev, people prefer direct personal contact rather than a conversation over the phone.

The candidate debate was attended by all six candidates for mayor who answered questions on issues raised in the questionnaires. Active local CSOs also participated in the debate by asking questions related to the improvement of the living and working conditions of women aged 30 to 45 in the region. The debate was covered by the local cable TV and the local radio station.

The high-visibility events of the campaign were the exhibition and the concert, which were organized at the Cultural Center in Gotse Delchev. More than 70 women participated in the exhibition with their own works of art. Folk singers from Gotse Delchev as well as guest singers from Sofia's High School of Music participated in the concert. The event was attended by about 100 women as well as by five candidates for mayors in the municipality and a number of candidates for municipal councilors.

14. IKAR Association, Haskovo

The local *Ti Izbirash* Campaign in Haskovo targeted the young families living in the town. It had the objective to help married young people overcome their social apathy and participate in the upcoming local elections.

Twelve IKAR volunteers conducted 22 informal meetings with young families. IKAR *Ti Izbirash* team visited a number of kindergartens, playgrounds, cafes and places visited predominantly by young mothers. As a result, 700 direct contacts were established with young people, parents of small children, etc. Of the people who participated in the meetings, 311 took part in IKAR's survey on local issues and attitudes. More than 1,800 copies of print materials were distributed.

The local *Ti Izbirash* campaign in Haskovo was broadly covered by two local newspapers, three radio stations both national and local, and two cable TV channels.

As part of the project a meeting was organized in which both the young people of Haskovo and five of the candidates for mayors took part. The participants in the forum developed a memorandum of understanding on the basis of the survey results analysis. The focus of the publicly announced document was local government policy directed to young families and the commitments the candidates were ready to make in this direction.

The high visibility event of the local campaign was a concert, which took place at the town's central square. Children's folk ensembles and vocal groups attracted the attention of more than 300 people.

15. NEVO DROM Association, Kiustendil

The local *Ti Izbirash* campaign conducted by Nevo Drom Association aimed at increasing voter turnout in Kiustendil through focusing the attention of the Roma community on specific issues in the platforms of candidates for mayors and municipal councilors.

Three information centers were opened at three key locations in the Roma neighborhoods in Kiustendil where people could get acquainted with the authorities of local government, the structure and the functions of the municipal council, and the specificity of the voting process. Every week open-air discos were organized with the purpose of popularizing the campaign among the young Roma population. This was one of the most successful ways through which volunteers were recruited.

The high visibility event of the local *Ti Izbirash* campaign in Kiustendil was the candidate debate organized in the Roma neighborhood. It was the first forum of its kind in the city and attracted a Roma audience of almost 1,000 people. The organizers had to put a screen in the outside for those who were not able to get into the room to watch. The effect of the debate was a feeling of empowerment and mobilization leading to the election of two councilors of Roma origin – another precedent setting fact.

16. Association of Parents of Children with Disabilities, Varna

The local campaign organized by Association of Parents of Children with Disabilities in Varna targeted people with disabilities living in the city as well as their relatives.

A list of people with disabilities was created through the social services. In this way the target group was clearly identified. Eight volunteers were recruited and trained on the problems of people with disabilities. The training focused on concrete texts from the Electoral Law guaranteeing the voting rights of people with disabilities.

In addition, information centers were established in a chain of supermarkets in Varna where volunteers were distributing the national print materials of the national *Ti Izbirash* campaign. The owners of the supermarkets provided free use of computer terminals to ease the process of voter registration and information about precincts and polls.

Parents, young people and people with disabilities from Varna initiated the signing of a memorandum for collaboration with the local government. The memorandum was publicly developed and recognized by the major candidates for mayors and municipal councilors as well as by some of the local CSOs. It was distributed among the citizens of Varna. The memorandum aimed at encouraging people to vote and convincing them that in this way they were supporting the efforts of children and young people with disabilities to live a worthy and “normal” social life.

Sixty-seven parents of children with disabilities took part in the development of the document. They conducted six working meetings to draft the final version of the text and discussed thoroughly every single detail. The young people from the Daily Center for People with Disabilities were also invited to participate in the process of designing the memorandum.

Ten individual meetings with candidates for mayors were carried out. They had the purpose of arriving at a clear picture of what the situation with the social sector in Varna is. Possible future changes as well as possible solutions to the most pressing problems of people with disabilities were discussed at those meetings.

The dialogue was focused on the specific problems of people with disabilities. Each paragraph of the memorandum was illustrated and supported by a concrete social practice example to prevent the notorious practice of making empty promises that are never kept.

All invited people and organizations signed the memorandum consisting of two parts: general principles and concrete commitments on the part of the candidates.

On election day the Association of Parents of Children with Cerebral Palsy provided assistance to people with disabilities to exercise their right to vote in municipal elections. The organization advertised a telephone line at which a total of 50 people with disabilities submitted transportation requests during the week before the elections. As of 1 p.m. on election day another 23 people with disabilities approached the organization with assistance requests.

Three specialized minivans and four cars were rented to take the voters with disabilities to the polls and back. The transportation effort aimed at increasing turnout among disabled voters followed a specially planned schedule.

17. Women's Alliance NADEZHDA, Razgrad

The local campaign conducted by the Women's Alliance NADEZHDA targeted those employed in the service sector in Razgrad. A total of 24 volunteers were trained to carry out the campaign activities, 15 of whom were teenagers.

As part of the project, NADEZHDA volunteers were going door-to-door in an effort to encourage people to vote. In parallel they were conducting a survey on people's attitudes to and expectations from the local government. About 240 people (students, employed, unemployed and pensioners) were reached during the first wave of the door-to-door campaign. The second wave was directed to the undecided voters. This time the effort reached about 420 people representatives of the target group. In addition, a third survey was conducted with randomly selected people in order to arrive at a general picture of what the local attitudes were.

A motivational seminar was organized as part of the local campaign in which 23 representatives of the target group took part. The seminar focused mainly on the role and functions of local government. Interactive methods, such as role play, were used to train participants.

The local *Ti Izbirash* campaign in Razgrad was closed with a party at which the team working on the project thanked the volunteers for their commitment and their hard work.

The activities carried out under the project were covered by EUROCOM TV Channel, TOP TV –Shoumen, and GLEDISHTA Newspaper.

18. PODKREPA Labour Union, Lom

The *Ti Izbirash* campaign carried out by PODKREPA Labour Union in Lom targeted workers and administrative staff, members of the union, unemployed and minority groups in their active working age.

The message of the local campaign was published three times a week in the local newspaper and was broadcast on the local cable TV channels four times a day for a period of one month.

Methods employed were phone banking, door-to door canvassing, meetings with first-time voters in several local high schools, meetings with representatives of the minority groups in the town of Lom, meetings with members of PODKREPA Labour Union, and candidate debate shown on the two local TV channels.

19. PODKREPA Labour Union, Kazanlak

The *Ti Izbirash* campaign in Kazanlak was directed to members of the union as well as to their families. The number of the volunteers recruited to work on the project was in proportion to the number of members of each trade union section in the town of Kazanlak. All 27 volunteers participated in a two-day seminar at which they were trained on how to conduct a door-to-door campaign.

The first wave of the door-to-door campaigning was carried out in 23 residential districts in Kazanlak and reached 820 families, or approximately 1,600 people. The door-to-door canvassing contributed a lot to strengthening the organizational capacity of the union.

Another seminar was organized as the local campaign was unfolding. This time it was attended by PODKREPA leaders, and the major issues discussed were related to the functioning of the local government. The participants in the seminar were acquainted with the Law on Local Government and Local Administration as well as with the Law on Local Elections.

A candidate forum was organized. Approximately 2,000 locally developed print materials were distributed.

20. PODKREPA Labor Union, Dupnitsa

The local *Ti Izbirash* campaign carried out by PODKREPA, Dupnitsa targeted members of the union in the seven municipalities in the region – Dupnitsa, Rila, Kocherinovo, Sapareva Bania, Bobov Dol and Boboshevo.

A total of 100 volunteers were recruited and trained to work on the campaign, 73 of whom had never volunteered before. At a specially organized seminar, the volunteers were trained how to conduct surveys and door-to-door campaigns.

PODKREPA Dupnitsa fielded questionnaires in the enterprises of all 6 municipalities. About 9,700 representatives of the target group were interviewed. The aim of the survey was to determine the approximate number of people who didn't plan to vote in the local elections.

The campaign called “hand-to-hand” and “mouth-to-mouth” was considered to be very successful. About 9,000 copies of print materials were distributed throughout the campaign.

21. Women's Alliance for Development, Sofia

The Women's Alliance for Development (WAD) participated in NDI's two previous *Ti Izbirash* programs. This time they focused their efforts on young (18 – 25 years old) mothers and university students living in the students' town in Sofia. The objective of the project was to turn those women voters out by identifying their specific issues and working to put them in the election campaign agenda leading to improved communication and problem solutions.

WAD recruited and trained 18 volunteers – students, who after that canvassed the students’ family dorms reaching 536 women from that target audience. The canvassers circulated an issue identification questionnaire, motivational materials and voter registration forms.

Following that first wave of door-to-door, WAD held a candidate debate on the issues of their target group. Some of the major Sofia mayor candidates showed up. At the debate they made concrete commitments, which were published in a leaflet disseminated in the students’ town the week prior to election day.

22. Gender Project for Bulgaria, Pernik

On October 17, 2003 the team working on *Ti Izbirash* organized a candidate forum on the problems of the Roma community in the city of Pernik. The debate was attended by candidates for mayors supported by all political parties running (11). This was the first-ever debate of its kind in Pernik – focusing on the Roma issues only and thus raising the profile of the Roma community. Therefore it was a challenge for the Roma community and its leaders, but it also stirred significant media and public interest. The debate was attended by 200 representatives of the Roma community. The issues discussed had been identified and agreed upon through participatory working groups. The interest in the event, the engagement of the audience and the responsiveness of the candidates exceeded the expectations of the organizers.

23. Balkan Assist, Sofia

Balkan Assist conducted a local campaign targeting first-time voters in one of the municipalities in Sofia – Ilinden. The NGO had experience with administering small grants, however this was its first field grassroots experience.

The organization developed print materials with information about voting and what people would vote for corresponding in style and content with the target audience. They developed also a lesson plan on citizen participation. They delivered the citizen participation class in 5 out of the 6 high schools in that municipality reaching directly 800 first-time voters. The questionnaires filled by the students after the classes revealed that 62% of them learned new useful information, and 58% would consider voting. The greatest obstacle proved to be the apathy and lack of support on the part of their parents.

Balkan Assist organized a youth public forum where the candidates were invited, and some of the major ones showed up (for instance Lyuben Dilov). About 70 young people raised issues, shared their views about the youth policy in that municipality, and asked questions. The candidates’ commitments were published in a brochure, 2,000 copies of which were distributed in high schools. The forum ended with a youth disco party “come and meet the candidates.”

The turnout numbers show that 31% of the target audience voted on October 26. Even though the NGO was not able to find a base for comparison, the turnout is significant for that particular age group – 18/19 year olds.

24. Independent Living – ROMA, Lom

The local campaign organized by Independent Living –ROMA was carried out in two neighborhoods with a predominate Roma population in the town of Lom.

The organization used a very interesting method for volunteer recruitment. It attracted at least 2 young people, a boy and a girl, from each of the 15 major families in the two Roma neighborhoods. The recruitment process was carried out in two waves. The second wave took part in the final stage of the campaign in order to inspire volunteers’ enthusiasm. NDI representatives talked to more than 30 *Ti Izbirash* volunteers most of whom were between the ages of 17 and 19. When asked what motivated them to take part in the GOTV campaign they answered with a smile that they wanted to show the future local government that the young people care about what was going on in their hometown.

Among the methods the organization used were meetings with first-time voters, distribution of print materials, and the production of a video spot with the help of the ROMA TV in Vidin. The spot was shown at the discos organized regularly in the two Roma neighborhoods.

In addition, two information centers were opened in the two Roma neighborhoods where people could find answers to their questions related to the election process as well as to the responsibilities and functions of local government. Two volunteers were available at each of the two centers, distributing postcards with the message “I am going to vote for accessible environment, for clean streets, for my children and for their future!” as well as leaflets in which

citizens could read about decisions affecting the Roma population made by the municipal council as well as some details on the voting procedure.

Independent Living ROMA was one of the few CSOs which carried out activities on Election Day. Coloring the school yard with the green cylinders, the 30 *Ti Izbirash* volunteers in Lom were distributing green balloons “*I already cast my vote*” to those who had already exercised their right to vote. In addition, a special minivan with a driver was providing transportation for people with disabilities. As of 10:30 am 20 out of 70 people with disabilities who had previously asked for assistance were transported to the polling stations.

Roma participation in Mladenovo (the most numerous Roma community in Lom) was reported to be 10% higher than the average for the city. No official results were announced because the runoff results were being appealed in court.

25. UNA of Bulgaria – Youth Section, Sofia

The local campaign “I also live in this city” was launched in the dormitories in students’ town. Representatives of the students’ council at Sofia University together with representatives of the youth section of UNA in Bulgaria carried out a door-to-door campaign in the students’ dormitories in the last few days before election day in an effort to encourage their peers to vote.

The Sofia-based organization recruited 20 volunteers who were distributing registration forms to students with temporary registration in student’s town. Submitting the completed forms to student’s town municipality by 10 October 2003 would give those students the right to vote according to their current address.

Ti Izbirash volunteers visited the dormitories of Sofia University first and then went to the dormitories of the other schools of higher education in the capital. According to unofficial data, approximately 30,000 young people live in student’s town. Representatives of the Student’s Council explained that if only 1000 of these people go to the polls on Election Day, they could influence the final election results.

A special e-forum was opened as part of the campaign. Special letters of request were sent to the 39 candidates for mayors in Sofia. They were asked to share their ideas on how plan to solve the problems of the students living in student’s town. The commitments and promises made by the candidates were printed in a special leaflet.

In addition, a massive students’ party was organized in Sofia University on the evening of 1 October – the beginning of the academic school year. Free food was provided to students at five key locations in the main building of Sofia University. A student guide was also distributed to first year students. The booklet contained answers to some of the most frequently asked questions related to students’ life.

What happened in "Ti Izbirash"

One more week full of events and activities for "Ti Izbirash" National Voter Education and GOTV Campaign has passed. It could be called "the week of public forums" because 10 round tables, candidate debates, and town hall meetings have been held the last seven days, at which specific local issues were raised for discussion. The civic organizations partnering on the campaign focused their efforts on making these forums more than a stage for empty promises; instead, they sought focused, concrete commitments from the candidates for mayor and municipal councilors.

In the last days before the Local Elections, a second wave of direct contacts was carried out focusing on undecided voters. Methods of voter contact included telephone banking, door-to-door canvassing, direct mail, and self-addressed post cards.

The Campaign is enjoying extensive coverage both on the national and on the local level. A number of interviews and pieces of reporting have been broadcast on the national TV channels bTV and MSAT, as well as on the Bulgarian National Radio. In addition, local electronic- and print- media showed great interest in covering the activities of the civic organizations partnering in the campaign. Many journalists, TV hosts, and public figures gave their support to the campaign and its message by putting on green cylinder hats that read "TI IZBIRASH".

In the third issue of "Ti Izbirash" Newsletter, we provided the civic organizations with the opportunity to share what they have achieved throughout the campaign as well as what lessons they have learned.

NDI Bulgaria



Print materials produced by the civic organizations partnering in Ti Izbirash Campaign

"Vassil Levski" Human Rights Center, Karlovo

On 20th October, 2003 five candidates for mayor in the Municipality of Karlovo took part in a debate "Elections 2003 – a vote accessible to everyone". The problems of people with disabilities, young people, and the Roma community were discussed at the debate. The forum was organized by Vassil Levski Human Rights Center, Dialogue- today newspaper and Sky TV Channel.

Dimitar Katsev (Bulgarian Social Democracy), Toshko Stoev (National Movement Simeon II), Branimir Botev (IMRO), and the independent candidates Bozhidar Leonov and Ilia Pirinchev, presented their platforms and answered questions asked by representatives of the three target groups.



Participants in the debate "Elections 2003 – a vote accessible to everyone", which was held in Karlovo

Branimir Botev impressed all participants by presenting approved projects for opening a Youth Center, creating new jobs, and building a canteen for the poor. Bozhidar Leonov officially announced that as a rector of Karlovo College he would work in the direction of making admissions accessible to people with disabilities and the representatives of minority groups. Dimitar Katsev said that he had plans to restore the Daycare Center for people with disabilities. Ilia Pirinchev didn't make any promises.

From a total number of 14 candidates for mayor in the Municipality of Karlovo, 4 submitted written apologies that they wouldn't be able to participate in the debate because of previous commitments.

DIALOGUE Today, Regional Daily
Karlovo-Sopot

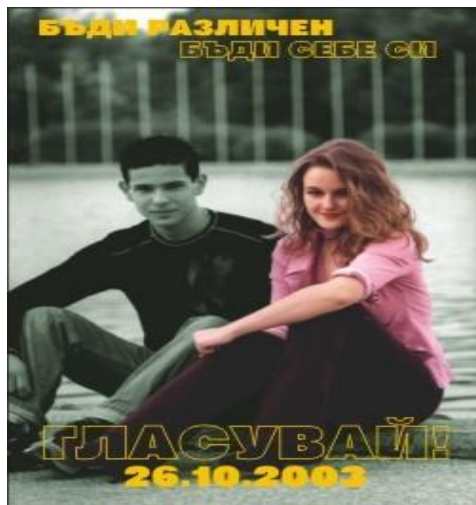


VOTER EDUCATION AND GOTV PROGRAM

LOCAL ELECTIONS 2003

Foundation National Alliance for Volunteer Action, Plovdiv

"Be different, be yourself, go vote!" is the message of the local campaign carried out by National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA). The organization has recruited 70 young volunteers to participate in the campaign, which aims at increasing voter turnout among first-time voters in Plovdiv.



NAVA organized two volunteer trainings during which the volunteers were trained how to conduct two of the main activities of the local campaign: door-to-door canvassing and tabling.

Teams of trained volunteers conducted interviews with first-time voters from several high schools in Plovdiv. In most of the cases conversations turned into lively discussions. Among the questions students most often asked were: "What would I achieve if I vote?", "Who should I vote for provided that I don't like any of the candidates?", "Why shall I vote, if nothing gets better?".

It's hard to change the attitudes of those who are convinced that participating in the election process is pointless. The volunteers tried to strike up a conversation with their peers by asking questions like: "What arguments do you have in favor of your decision not to vote?", "Please give examples of alternative ways through which you can participate in the decision-making process on the level of local government!", "Do you know what will happen to your potential vote, if you don't cast a ballot?" Although some of the young people were very skeptical, but there were some very enthusiastic people as well. The interviews with the people belonging to the second group were naturally easier. The young people were given information how to vote and what choices they have.

The volunteers of NAVA distributed more than 7000 copies of information brochures in 16 high schools in Plovdiv and established direct or indirect contacts with about 5000 high school students.

Information centers were opened in key locations in Plovdiv at which citizens could get more information about the voting procedure. Two of these centers work with students from the six schools of higher education in Plovdiv, among whom there were first-time voters.

For the three days before the elections, Plovdiv will wake up with color posters posted up all over the city saying, "Be different!", "Be yourself!", "Go vote!" and indicating the date of the Local Elections: 26th October. The campaign message aims to challenge young people and all other citizens to vote. We hope that in the end our efforts will achieve the desired results: the young people of Plovdiv will realize that it is important for their voice to be heard and that they have to vote for their future.

Daniela Tepavicharova

"The most interesting thing for us this year was the volunteer training under "Ti Izbirash" Campaign. We had the chance to work with young volunteers and to strengthen the volunteer network. We are very happy that there are young people enthusiastic about their own future and about the future of Bulgaria."

Yordanka Germanovaa
PODKREPA, Dupnitsa

Interethnic Partnership Association, Varna

On 20 October 2003, a meeting was held between the candidates for mayors in Varna and the citizens of Asparuhovo Residential District. All candidates who attended the meeting presented their platform and shared their views on the future development of the Residential District.

In the course of the meeting volunteers were gathering "ballots" on which citizens participating in the debate have written some of the most pressing problems the community faces in special urns. After the "ballots" were counted, it turned out that the poor condition of the road system, the dirty streets, the streetlights, as well as the stray dogs were among the most pressing problems of Asparuhovo.

In the evening there was a party at which people ate from a cake with the logo of the National "Ti Izbirash" Campaign.

Gergana Toncheva



VOTER EDUCATION AND GOTV PROGRAM

LOCAL ELECTIONS 2003

PROXEN Women's Union, Kazanlak

On October 14, 2003, the Youth group of the Women's Union, *Proxen-Kazanlak*, held a roundtable. 13 youth organizations, 6 candidates for mayor and local media were invited to participate. The main objective was to conduct an open dialogue between candidates for mayor of the Kazanlak municipality, the city youth, and its civic organizations.



Participants in the round table organized by PROXEN - Kazanlak

The forum was attended by a representative of UDF caucus and the independent candidates Donchev, Piskova, and Chichekov.

Every participant in the round table received information materials: *Ti Izbirash* leaflets and a questionnaire to local candidates focusing on local youth issues in Kazanlak. The questionnaire was designed based on a survey with 950 young respondents and 35 working meetings of the 13 organizations-members of the Union of Youth Organizations in Kazanlak.

Among the topics discussed were education, unemployment, fulfilling spare-time, and youth violence. The demands and expectations of the young people were presented first, and afterwards that the candidates had the chance to express their position.

Special attention was given to the problems of the Roma youth in the city. All candidates agreed that efforts need to be made leading to Roma integration at all levels, as well as offering them different opportunities for development.

The event stirred the interest of both participants and media.

The roundtable was held as a follow-up to the spectacular rally of young people and youth organizations on October 14, in which more than 110 people marched along the main street of the city and provoked the interest of the general public. The high-visibility event aimed to mobilize youth and demonstrate their strength. The march –in which more than 110 young people participated– was led by the Women's Rocker Club "Tender Roses" and the Men's Rocker Club "Black Roses". The most attractive element of the rally was the rocker motorbikes covered by campaign stickers.

The rally culminated at the Rozarium Park where it grew into a rock-the-vote concert. The event collected around 250 young people who enjoyed the performance of local bands, sketches with actors from the actors' club associated with the Lyubomir Kabakchiev Theater, and folk songs presented by Kazanlak high school students with national recognition. The concert ended with a discotheque for the youth.

Miroslava Chantova

The Volunteers of "Ti Izbirash"



Volunteers of PODKREPA, Vratsa



Volunteers of Independent Living ROMA - Lom



VOTER EDUCATION AND GOTV PROGRAM

LOCAL ELECTIONS 2003

"Ti Izbirash" in the press

On 12 October – the Day of Bulgarian Municipality, a football competition gathered together candidates for mayors at Karlovo Stadium.

Football teams of candidates for mayors and municipal councilors supported by NMS, the Democratic Left, UDF, IMRO and a number of other parties responded to the initiative of Eng. Dimitar Katsev carried out under the auspices of "Vassil Levski" Human Rights Center – Karlovo, and took part in the football competition entitled "Let's revive Karlovo football".

*DIALOGUE Today, Regional Daily,
Karlovo-Sopot*

The project for increasing citizen participation among young people who live in Silistra is directed to first-time voters. The Project envisages the establishment of a regional-youth lobby which will carry out election campaign for increasing future politicians' interest in and commitment to the problems of the young people in the region. According to representative of the youth organization partnering in "Ti Izbirash" young people have to realize that:

- quality local government can be achieved only by means of active citizen participation;
- participation in local government will broaden the foundations of democracy and will contribute the solution of regional problems;
- the institutions should work for the needs of the voters guaranteeing opportunities for improving their abilities and competencies;
- only through exercising their right to vote, they can they can stand up for their positions;

The message of the local campaign in Silistra is "The Future is Yours – express your demands!"

*USPEH Daily
Silistra*

problems of their community; 3) giving 20 Roma women activists from Pernik the opportunity to apply in practice the theoretical background they have received under previous projects, and to build on it practical community organizing skills;



Participants in the candidate debate on the problems of the Roma community in Pernik

The debate was attended by 200 representatives of the Roma community and by 11 candidates for mayor from the main political parties. The interest in the event, the engagement of the audience, and the responsiveness of the candidates exceeded the expectations of the organizers.

The project aimed at educating not only the Roma people but also local politicians on how to be less emotional, speak less, take on greater responsibility, show professional attitude to politics, and apply into practice new knowledge and skills enhancing the new political culture. This debate was the first visible step in that direction. It also proved to be a good practice that can be successfully applied in the future.

Bistra Boneva

"Gender Project for Bulgaria Foundation"

On 17th October 2003 the team working on "Ti Izbirash" Project organized a candidate forum on the problems of the Roma community in the city of Pernik. The debate was attended by candidates for mayor from different political parties. **This was the first debate of its kind ever in Pernik. Therefore it was a challenge not only for the Roma community and its leaders, but also for the team who organized it.**

The project aimed to: 1) helping the Roma people from Pernik make an informed choice for a mayor and municipal councilors through informing them on the role of local government and the rights and responsibilities of citizens; 2) improving the skills of the Roma people in Pernik for identifying and formulating the specific



1000 Sofia
159 Rakovski Str.
Floor 2, apt 5; tel/fax 980 77 53
e-mail: ndi_bg@mail.orbitel.bg
National Democratic Institute

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